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ABSTRACT

Student attitudes towards the use of portfolios to encourage journal reading are investigated in lower division psychology classes. Portfolios can be designed in various ways to meet different educational goals. It is also useful for undergraduates to read original research articles, but difficult to motivate them to do so. The intention of this portfolio approach is to provide students with an opportunity to explore the discipline of psychology freely without providing extra credit or having this reading be a large part of the final grade. Forty students from two classes were required to keep portfolios during the semester. Although several assignments were included in the portfolio, the major portion consisted of one-page reaction papers written in response to research articles that students selected off a list of journals from the library. They could read whatever interested them. A 14-item survey was used to evaluate the assignment after portfolios were handed in. The survey and details of procedures are included in this "poster" article. Students reported that they enjoyed the assignment, preferred the reading portfolio to doing a term paper on one subject, and felt that the portfolio was a good learning experience. (EMK)

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ED 426 333

Student Attitudes Towards Portfolios to Encourage Journal Reading

Abstract

This study investigates student attitudes towards the use of portfolios to encourage journal reading in lower division psychology classes. Students from two classes (N=40) at a small midwestern college kept portfolios during the semester. The major part of the portfolio consisted of reaction papers written in response to research articles which students selected off a list of journals which the library carries. Students reported that they enjoyed the portfolio assignment and felt that the portfolio was a good learning experience.

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Student Attitudes Towards Portfolios

to Encourage Journal Reading

Introduction

The use of portfolios in education has been discussed (Shaklee, et.al. 1997), and a growing consensus among researchers is that portfolios can be designed in various ways to meet different educational goals (Wolf, & Siu-Runyan, 1996). For example, researchers have incorporated portfolios into psychology courses to improve the writing and critical thinking skills of students (Rickabaugh, 1993), and enhance the course content (Beers, 1985; Suter, & Frank, 1986).

The usefulness of having undergraduate students read original research articles has also been discussed (Chamberlain & Burrough, 1985; Steuer, 1996). One common theme is the difficulty in motivating students to read original research (Carkenord, 1994; Chamberlain & Burrough, 1985). To overcome this problem researchers have tried a variety of methods: (a) selecting readings that are cited in the introductory textbook (Gareis, 1995), (b) provide students a list of articles and questions to be answered over each article (Chamberlain & Burrough, 1985), (c) provide a list of journals from which students choose articles of interest (Beers, 1985, Keller, 1982), (d) select specific articles which meet class goals (Carkenord, 1994; Suter & Frank, 1986), (e) offer journal reading as extra credit (Gareis, 1995), and (f) have journal reading comprise a large part of the final grade (Beers, 1985, Rickabaugh, 1993). Although there has been a variety of

motivational methods employed, most consider reading original research a regular assignment in the course (Carkenord, 1994; Gareis, 1995; Keller, 1982).

Little research has investigated how to motivate students to read journals outside the regular course assignments with the intention of providing students an opportunity to explore the discipline more freely without providing extra credit or making it a large part of the final grade (Keller, 1982). Also, little research has looked at how journal reading could be part of a student portfolio. Beers (1985) considered article reading as one of six optional activities that could be placed in a portfolio.

The purpose of this study is to explore student attitudes toward the use of portfolios as a way to encourage journal reading to expose students to the different research areas in psychology in lower level psychology courses.

Methods

Participants

Students from an Introduction to Psychology course (N=18) and Lifespan Development Class (N=22) at a small midwestern college participated in this study.

Portfolios

Students were required to keep a portfolio during the semester. The directions for the portfolio, as stated in the syllabus is as follows.

> Each student is to keep a portfolio containing the materials for this class. This will be handed in at the end of the semester for a grade. It will be graded on how completely the requirements for different grades are met. These will be collected the last week of classes.

The following criteria were used to evaluate the portfolios, these criteria are also printed in the syllabus. Portfolios comprised 9% of the students grade in introduction to psychology and 12.5% in lifespan development.

A - Have all old exams with the wrong answers corrected.

- Find eight research articles in the library from the journals on the list at the end of the syllabus, read them, and write a one page reaction to them.

- All handouts from class, and all filled out.

B - Have all old exams with the wrong answers corrected.

-Find five research articles in the library from the journals on the list at the end of the syllabus, read them, and write a one page reaction to them.

- All handouts from class, and all filled out.

C - Have all old exams.

- Find two research articles in the library from the journals on the list at the end of the syllabus, read them, and write a one page reaction to them.

- All handouts from class, and some of them filled out.

D - Save old exams, maybe one or two missing.

- Most of the handouts from class, not filled out.

F - Do nothing, never hand it in.

Procedures

Students were asked to select articles to read that interest them from the journals available in the college library. The last page of the syllabus listed journals available in the library with a brief description of the type of articles in the journal. Students were asked to read the article, and then write a one page reaction to it. The purpose of the reaction

paper was to have students agree, disagree, question, or expand upon the ideas in the study. Students were clearly told that they were not to write a summary of the article, and that a summary would not be accepted as a paper. At the end of the reaction paper students were to give the complete reference to the article. All portfolios were collected the week before finals. During the class in which the portfolios were due students briefly presented what they considered to be the two most interesting studies they found to the class. To aid in grading students were asked to fill out a sheet stating what grade their portfolio should receive and why, and handed this in with their portfolio.

Instrument

After the portfolio was handed in students were asked to complete a 14-item survey over the assignment. Students were asked to evaluate the assignment by rating statements from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Students were asked not to put their names on the surveys and told that their responses would not affect their final course grade.

Results

Of the two classes, 80% of the students earned an A, 15% a B, 2.5% a C, and 2.5% a D on the portfolio assignment.

Student responses to the portfolio were positive (see Table 1). Students reported that the journals were easy to find (94%) and that there was a good selection of articles (97%). Students also chose articles that reflected their interests (82%), and caused them to think more deeply about the topic (79%). Students also reported learning by hearing what other students read (79%).

Concerning the evaluation of the portfolios students felt the requirements were clearly stated (100%), that the grading criteria were clearly stated (100%), and that they were in control of their grade (100%).

Students also felt this assignment was more interesting than writing a term paper (97%), exposed them to different areas of research (94%), increased their interest in psychology (70%), and felt that this assignment was not too much work (61%).

Overall students reported that they enjoyed the portfolio assignment (64%) and felt that the portfolio and presentation was a good learning experience (91%).

These positive ratings are reinforced by the additional comments students wrote on the evaluation. Common themes were that they would rather do the portfolio than a research project because it exposed them to a wider variety of topics, they choose articles that were related to their everyday life, and they enjoyed the assignment.

Discussion

Overall students reported that the portfolio was a positive experience and reading the journal articles enhanced the learning in the course. It exposed them to the different areas of research within psychology and gave them the freedom to read articles on topics of interest to them.

One concern that must be addressed is how well this assignment improves the learning of students and exposed students to the broad field of psychology. Although this study did not collect data directly measuring the portfolio's impact on learning, student comments such as "This assignment was a beneficial learning experience" and "much more learning was accomplished than writing an eight page research article on one topic" suggest that this goal was at least partially achieved. Also, other students stated that "I

enjoyed doing the reaction papers, I found many interesting articles that broadened my knowledge on different psychological topics" and "this assignment was a good way for students to see what psychology is all about" seem to suggest that students did learn more about psychology than if they had not done the assignment.

To further explore the use of the portfolio as a teaching and learning tool current data is being collected that examines the relationship between the student self evaluation of the portfolio and the final grade the portfolio receives, exam scores, and the final course grade.

To help reduce the logistics of grading portfolios at the end of the semester it may be more effective if students turn them in two or three times during the semester. This would allow for more instructor feedback as well as reduce the number of papers that need to be graded at the end of the semester. Likewise, this might get students to begin reading the journal articles sooner in the semester, thus relieving the pressure on the library the last couple of weeks during the semester. Overall students rated this portfolio assignment positively and felt it was an effective method to encourage students to read journal articles.

Table 1.

Student Attitudes toward the use of Journal Articles as Part of the Portfolio (N = 40).

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
The journals were easy to find in the library.		3	3	64	30
There was a good selection of journal articles to choose from.			3	64	33
The articles I chose reflected my interest.			18	61	21
Writing the reaction papers caused me to think more deeply about the research papers.			21	55	24
Sharing the research articles in class exposed me to interesting areas of research		3	15	55	24
The requirements for the portfolio were clearly stated.				36	64
The grading criteria for the portfolio were clearly stated.				33	67
I felt like I was in control of the grade I would receive on my portfolio.				36	64
Writing reaction papers to different research articles was more interesting than writing a term paper.			3	27	70
This project exposed me to the different topics that psychologist do research in.			6	49	45
This assignment increased my interest in psychology.			30	46	24
The portfolio was too much work.	27	34	27	9	3
I enjoyed the portfolio assignment.		3	33	4	15
Overall the portfolio and presentation was a good learning experience.			9	61	30

Note. Numbers in table represent the percentage of responses in each category.

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